

WYCOMBE Wanderers, seriously handicapped by injuries to several key players, were held to a goalless draw by Walthamstow Avenue at Loakes Park on Good Friday and so can say goodbye to any serious hopes of retaining their Rothmans Isthmian League Division One championship.

Providing they win their last four matches Wanderers can finish the season with a maximum 84 points — a target that both Enfield and Dagenham can beat easily even if they slip up a little.

Wycombe Wanderers 0, Walthamstow Avenue 0

REPORT BY MICHAEL KNOX

Football of course is a funny game, but it will need a near miracle for The Blues to win the title now.

A crowd of 1,300 — Wycombe's largest for some weeks — went to Loakes Park in the hope of seeing an entertaining match with a number of goals. They went away having witnessed one of the dulllest and least skilful games of the season.

There were a number of reasons for this sub-standard

match — Wycombe's injury problems, Avenue's tough tackling and a whistle-happy referee who made poor use of the advantage law.

Let's go into these three factors in greater depth because, to be honest, there is little else to write about a game which had the minimum of goalmouth incident.

With key striker Tony Horseman injured on the sidelines, Wycombe manager Brian Lee brought in promising striker

Bruce Macrae, who has already become a favourite with the home fans.

Unfortunately for Macrae his comeback was cut short after 12 minutes, when he had to be carried off the field with an injury to his right ankle. The man who did the damage was Avenue's number seven O'Brien, who was given a severe lecture by the referee, Mr. G. J. Previt.

O'Brien, who only came into the side at the last minute, must have regretted his part in the incident, for he was roundly booed for the remainder of the half by the Wycombe supporters, who don't forget such misdemeanours quickly.

Macrae's departure was a severe blow to Wycombe's hopes of scoring a goal, and meant certain amount of reshuffling within the ranks. Substitute Dave Bullock came in at right-back, Paul Birdseye moved into the mid-field while Mick Holfield became an out and out front-runner.

To make matters worse Geoff Anthony and Terry Reardon also went down with injuries in the first half. Anthony first had to receive attention after one of Wycombe's best chances, in the 38th minute. He worked a neat one-two with Dylan Evans and had only the goalkeeper to beat from 15 yards but shot straight at Townsend.

Anthony did not get up for a minute or so while he gingerly rubbed behind his right thigh. Jock Sheppard's aerosols did the trick but Anthony was never completely happy for the rest of the match. The same could be said of Reardon after he had received five minutes' attention off the field.

The main reason for this spate of injuries was Walthamstow's over-robust play. Left-back Richard Bradford was twice lectured to by Mr. Previt after crude tackles and the referee also spoke to about five other Avenue players following blatant fouls.

The problem might have been solved had the referee booked O'Brien for that early tackle on Macrae. But it was not until the 84th minute that he booked Bobby Conn — brother of Tottenham's Alfie — for an offence no worse than five or six others already committed by the visitors.

With all these injuries and free-kicks the match was naturally a stop-start affair. But it was made even worse by Mr. Previt's complete disregard for the advantage law. I will give you one example which illustrates the point perfectly.

As goalkeeper Townsend was taking a clearance kick from the edge of the penalty area he was fouled mildly by Evans. The ball was already on its way upfield when Mr. Previt blew his whistle. So play had then to be brought all the way back to Townsend, who had to take a free-kick from the place of the original foul.

Therefore, at least 30 seconds was wasted by a lack of common sense by the referee, who made a number of similar decisions which held up the game. Mr. Previt can argue that he kept the match under control, but every referee has a duty to keep it flowing as much as possible.

Wanderers' main weapon on Friday was the long throwing of Birdseye, which caused the visitors' defence all manner of problems, but it was from a Ray Eaton cross that Blues got the ball into the net in the 65th minute.

Townsend, under pressure from an attacker, dropped the ball at the feet of Holfield who fired it into the back of the net. The crowd erupted but were soon silenced by the referee's whistle which signalled a Walthamstow free-kick for an apparent foul on the goalkeeper.

Despite his injury Anthony was the sharpest of the Wycombe forwards, while Eaton and John Delaney enjoyed especially good games at the back.

For Walthamstow, Alan Droy — brother of Chelsea's Mickey — marshalled his defence well while coloured striker Allan Hunter was their most dangerous forward. But he, like every other player, was unable to set this match alight.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, R. Eaton, K. Masad, J. Delaney, T. Reardon, G. Anthony, D. Alexander, B. Macrae (sub D. Bullock 12 mins.), M. Holfield, D. Evans.

WALTHAMSTOW: D. Townsend; D. Blackman, R. Bradford, T. Blacktin, A. Droy, M. Smith, E. O'Brien, R. Conn, A. Jackson, A. Hunter, J. Nell. Sub. R. Sedgewick (not used).

Referee: G. J. Previt (Surrey).
Attendance: 1,300.